Rules of the Game
Animals (Part Three)
By Skip Williams

Last week, we began looking into the tricks that trained animals can perform. We conclude our review of tricks this week. After that, we briefly consider how an animal acts when nobody gives it a command.

Tricks, Continued

As noted in Part Two, the tricks a trained animal knows define the kinds of tasks it can perform for you during an encounter, so it pays to know what a trick allows an animal to do.

Heel: When you give this command, the animal moves adjacent to you (or possibly into your space if it's sufficiently small) and follows you wherever you go, even if you go somewhere the animal wouldn't normally go.

If an animal doesn't know this trick, getting it to travel along with you could require some effort. You could assume that an animal follows the character who handles its care and feeding; however, animals are notorious for becoming distracted when moving from place to place. Unless you keep the animal on a lead (or use it as a mount) you can pretty much count on delays when traveling as the animal dawdles or makes impulsive detours. The animal also can balk at crossing terrain that it finds unfamiliar or unpleasant. You might overcome either problem by pushing the animal (see Part One) to heel or by using the "come" command.

Perform: According to the rules, teaching an animal this trick allows it to execute a variety of simple stunts, such as sitting up, rolling over, roaring, or barking on command.

The rules don't say how many stunts the animal learns, but the examples make it fairly clear that the stunts must be both simple and well within the animal's physical limits. I recommend that the animal learn a suite of stunts that it can execute in about 3 minutes, say three to twelve stunts in all. Other possible stunts include jumping through hoops (for animals with Jump bonuses), balancing on a wire or rolling ball (for animals with Balance bonuses), or playing a simple tune (for almost any animal that can pick up and manipulate an object). Keep in mind that some stunts might require a trained character to make the animal perform on cue. For example, you can train animals to simulate the ability to perform arithmetic by responding to subtle cues from its trainer. In such a case, the assisting character also needs the Perform skill (most likely act), or some skill that allows covert communication, such as Bluff.

Seek: On command, the animal moves into an area you designate and looks for anything obviously alive or animate. The rules don't say what the animal does when it finds what it seeks, but I recommend that it stops and

From page 75 of the *Player's Handbook*:

Heel (DC 15): The animal follows you closely, even to places where it normally wouldn't go.

Perform (DC 15): The animal performs a variety of simple tricks, such as sitting up, rolling over, roaring or barking, and so on.

Seek (DC 15): The animal moves into an area and looks around for anything that is obviously alive or animate.

Stay (DC 15): The animal stays in place, waiting for you to return. It does not challenge other creatures that come by, though it still defends itself if it needs to.

Track (DC 20): The animal tracks the scent presented to it. (This requires the animal to have the scent ability; see the *Monster Manual* for details.)

Work (DC 15): The animal pulls or pushes a medium or heavy load.

does something to indicate the subject's location. For example, a dog might "point" (strike a rigid pose with its nose extended toward the subject).

Stay: When you give this command, the animal stays where it is until you give it another command. The rules don't say so, but this command does not work when the animal is engaged in combat or any other intense activity (you need the down command for that).

While waiting, the animal does not try to guard the area against intruders, but it does defend itself if attacked. Likewise, it sees to its own needs, as noted in the notes about the "defend" trick in Part Two.

Track: Only animals that have the scent ability can learn this trick. When you give this command, you must present the animal with a scent to track. You can present a scent in any number of ways. The most reliable is to allow the animal to sniff some article that the target has worn or touched.

Work: You can command the animal to push or pull a medium or heavy load. The rules don't say so, but you reasonably could assume that the animal can perform other kinds of labor, provided it is physically able to do so, such as walking on a treadmill or lifting things (if the animal has a grasping appendage). Draft animals must know this trick before they can pull vehicles or other devices (such as farm implements) any appreciable distance. An animal that does not know this trick still can push or pull a medium or heavy load, but it is inclined to give up the task or try to escape after moving the load a short distance.

The DM must decide if the animal needs a harness or other special equipment to move the load. Most four-footed animals, for example, aren't very good at pushing unless provided with a bar or pad to push against. Likewise, most animals can't pull anything unless fitted with a harness over the chest or shoulders (or both).

How Animals Act When Not Commanded

As noted in Part One, you control an animal during an encounter by commanding it to perform tricks it knows ("handling" the animal). An animal, however, has a smidgen of Intelligence and usually a fair bit of Wisdom. An animal may do something useful during an encounter even without a command from a handler. Of course, an animal's actions are entirely in the hands of the DM when they're not commanded.

So, what might an animal do on its own? Here are a few things to consider.

- An animal generally acts according to its basic nature, but its training might overcome that.

Start by considering what the animal is all about.

For example, horses in the wild rely on their speed and their herd instinct to keep them safe. A horse given its head probably runs from danger. If one horse in a well-established group runs away (even with a rider), the other horses in the same group often follow along.

Dogs, on the other hand, are pack hunters. If characters a dog knows and trusts go into battle, that dog is quite likely to join the fight.

- A trained animal becomes a creature of habit.

Any animal that has used the same trick over and over again might revert to that trick when it doesn't know what its handler expects. For example, an animal that has received training to attack might prove aggressive enough to simply move toward the closest foe and attack no matter what its handler does. An animal that has received training to guard or seek might simply stand its ground, but it gives a warning about foes that the group might

not otherwise notice.

- An animal that lives with people tends to think of itself as "people" (or thinks of certain people as one of its own).

A neglected or mistreated animal probably doesn't care much about its handler's welfare, and even less about the handler's companions. A well-treated animal, however, probably thinks of itself as a member of the group and acts accordingly.

What's Next?

That's all the time we have this time. Next, we examine the animal companion class feature.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon* *Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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